The Government of Alberta's 3 YEAR PLAN for Education 1998/1999 to 2000/2001

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Message from the Minister

I am pleased to release *First things first…our children*, our new three-year plan for education in Alberta.

This plan, like every three-year plan before it, outlines goals and strategies designed to give every Alberta student the best education we can. Now, we are going even further. We are taking several bold steps to focus even more strongly on our students and their learning.

In this plan we introduce a new vision for education, a major increase in investment, and new programs and initiatives designed to give our students a solid foundation for a lifetime of learning and success. We have re-ordered our priorities for improvement. We have also added a new priority that acknowledges Albertans' need to know our education system is preparing the next generation to take their place in our province's future.

These changes are the direct result of listening to the concerns of parents, educators, administrators and members of communities across this province. Albertans have been diligent in providing their thoughts and ideas through meetings, school visits, forums and public consultations that included the provincial Education Summit and Alberta Growth Summit.

This tremendous public input has led to a new *Agenda for Opportunity* for the province that will provide a springboard for future success. We agree with Albertans that 'people development' is government's most important priority, and education is the key that will unlock our children's potential as individuals, and our potential as a society.

First things first…our children, the Government of Alberta's Three-Year Plan for Education, is the result of Albertans working together to identify the priorities and find ways to address them. What has been identified in partnership will only succeed in partnership. We must work together to implement this plan with the same enthusiasm we brought to the consultation process. The opportunities are written here, on every page.

I look forward to seeing next year's results report, and the impact we will have together on our children and their learning as we put first things first.

Gary G. Mar, Q.C.
Minister of Education

Introduction

People are government's most important business and Alberta's most important resource. A well-educated population is needed to sustain growth, to maintain the Alberta Advantage and to ensure our communities remain vibrant.

The Alberta government is putting children and young people first by identifying education as its top priority and investing in new initiatives to ensure students have a solid foundation for success. Government recognizes that an excellent education system - one that provides the best education for all Alberta students - is an essential investment in our future. Our education system needs to be maintained and improved if our youth are to receive the education they need and deserve.

Supporting an excellent education for our students is the focus of the Government of Alberta's Three-year Plan for Education, 1998/1999 to 2000/2001. This plan for the province's education system gives all Alberta students access to quality programs, helps them achieve high standards and prepares them for work, further study and citizenship.

Vision for Education

Alberta's young people are the best educated in the country, able to achieve their individual potential, create a positive future for themselves, their families and their communities, and contribute to Alberta's prosperity and superior quality of life.

Mission

To ensure that all Alberta students have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

Principles

- **Access to quality education:** Every student in Alberta has the right of access to a quality basic education which is consistent with the student's abilities and provides the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to fulfill personal goals and contribute to society as a whole.
- **Equity:** All students in Alberta must have access to a quality basic education regardless of where in the province they live.
- **Flexibility:** Within standards and policies set by the provincial government, there are opportunities for parent and student choice in the public education system. School boards, schools and individual teachers have flexibility to meet the educational needs of the students and communities they serve.
- **Responsiveness:** The student is the focus of all activities in the education system: legislation, policies and practices affecting all levels must support the efforts of communities to ensure school programs and services respond to the unique needs of each child.
- **Accountability:** All those involved in making decisions about educational matters, including the allocation of public funds for education, must be accountable for their decisions and choices. This includes the Minister of Education, school boards and their staff, parents, as well as students.

Core Business of Alberta Education

The provincial government has constitutional responsibility for education and has established an education system where that responsibility is shared among government, school authorities, teachers, parents and students. Within this system of shared responsibility, Alberta Education, under the direction of the Minister:

- ensures that high standards are established and communicated, focusing on what students need to learn;
- provides funding to school authorities on a fair, equitable and appropriate basis and controls the cost of education;
- develops and implements legislation, policies and long-range plans for the education system, and
- assesses and reports to government and the public on student achievement, cost and other results of the education system.

Basic Education in Alberta - the Definition

A basic education must provide students with a solid core program including language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Students will be able to meet the provincial graduation requirements and be prepared for entry into the workplace or post-secondary studies. Students will understand personal and community values and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Students will develop the capacity to pursue learning throughout their lives. Students also should have opportunities to learn languages other than English and to attain levels of proficiency and cultural awareness which will help to prepare them for participation in the global economy.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students are expected to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare them for life after high school. A basic education will allow students to:

- Read for information, understanding and enjoyment.
- Write and speak clearly, accurately and appropriately for the context.
- Use mathematics to solve problems in business, science and daily-life situations.
- Understand the physical world, ecology and the diversity of life.
- Understand the scientific method, the nature of science and technology, and their application to daily life.
- Know the history and geography of Canada and have a general understanding of world history and geography.
- Understand Canada's political, social, and economic systems within a global context.

- Respect the cultural diversity and common values of Canada.
- Demonstrate desirable personal characteristics such as respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty, caring, loyalty, and commitment to democratic ideals.
- Recognize the importance of personal well-being and appreciate how family and others contribute to that well-being.
- Know the basic requirements of an active, healthful lifestyle.
- Understand and appreciate literature, the arts and the creative process.
- Research an issue thoroughly and evaluate the credibility and reliability of information sources.
- Demonstrate critical and creative thinking skills in problem solving and decision making.
- Demonstrate competence in using information technologies.
- Know how to learn and work independently and as part of a team.
- Manage time and other resources needed to complete a task.
- Demonstrate initiative, leadership, flexibility, and persistence.
- Evaluate their own endeavours and continually strive to improve.
- Have the desire and realize the need for life-long learning.

Standards for Student Learning

The Minister of Education defines acceptable standards and standards of excellence for student achievement in consultation with Albertans. Employers are involved in specifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in the workplace. Schools, school authorities and the Minister of Education assess and report regularly to the public on a range of student learning.

The school's primary responsibility is to ensure that students meet or exceed the provincial standards, as reflected in the Student Learning Outcomes (outlined above), the Alberta Programs of Study, provincial achievement tests, diploma examinations and graduation requirements.

Education Delivery

Schools must engage students in a variety of activities that enable them to acquire the expected learnings. Schools have authority to deploy resources and may use any instructional technique acceptable to the community as long as the standards are achieved. Schools, teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of various delivery options including the use of technology, distance learning and the workplace.

Schools play a supportive role to families and the community in helping students develop desirable personal characteristics and the ability to make ethical decisions. Schools also help students take increasing responsibility for their learning and behaviour, develop a sense of community belonging and acquire a clearer understanding of community values and how these relate to personal values.

Students learn basic, transferable knowledge, skills and attitudes in school. Schools, in co-operation with employers, provide opportunities for students to develop and practice employability skills. The Minister of Education provides credit for off-campus learning that is approved and accepted by the school and the employer. Government works with schools, employers and post-secondary institutions to help young people make a smooth transition to work and further study.

Priority Areas for Improvement

Priority areas for improving Alberta's education system have been identified from information on provincial and local performance measures, implementation of the provincial three-year plan for education and the review of school board three-year education plans.

Improving co-ordination of services for children: To improve services for students with special needs, Alberta Education will work with school and regional authorities, other provincial departments and community partners to:

- improve the co-ordination of services for children, including health and related services;
- implement the Redesign of Children's Services so that services are co-ordinated and accessible for children in school, including Aboriginal children; and
- develop service co-ordination skills of post-secondary students preparing for careers in education, health, justice and social services.

Increasing high school completion rates: To build skills students need for success throughout school, Alberta Education will:

- provide programs in the earliest years of schooling to ensure a solid foundation and to help prevent failure that leads to dropping out;
- support alternatives to traditional schooling, including non-conventional classroom settings (e.g. more outreach programs, flexible student schedules, and use of technology for instruction);
- work with Albertans to revise curriculum to emphasize employability skills; and
- improve career education so that our young people get the education they will need to succeed in the twenty-first century.

Improving secondary student achievement in mathematics: To enable students to develop strong mathematics skills, Alberta Education will:

- work with school authorities to implement the new common western mathematics program and instructional materials;
- provide detailed information on student performance in provincial assessment programs to help schools plan instruction; and
- focus funding on basic skills in elementary schools so students have a solid foundation for success in mathematics in junior and senior high school.

Improving access to information technology: To enhance students' information technology skills, Alberta Education will:

- incorporate technology learning outcomes into the curriculum;
- provide funds for instructional technology; and
- work with education partners to develop courseware, provide alternative delivery options and enhance teachers' ability to integrate technology into instruction.

Improving public satisfaction with education: To ensure Albertans know that students are getting the education they need, Alberta Education will:

- work with education partners to create more opportunities to communicate the accomplishments of students and
- enhance the ability of department staff to communicate student accomplishments and provincial directions for education.

These priority improvement areas are addressed in this plan and in school authority three-year plans, 1998/1999 to 2000/2001. New investment in education will provide school boards with additional resources to help make improvements in these five key areas.

New Investment in Education, 1998/1999 to 2000/2001

The bold new investment program totaling about $380 million over three years lays the foundation for maintaining and improving education into the next millennium. This is an increase of about 13 per cent over Budget '97. A further spending increase of about $60 million to support education in public and separate schools will be offset by reductions in debenture interest and Ministry operations. Consistent with our theme of first things first... our children, we are focusing these funds on students.

Funding for education is directed to the classroom in critical areas and provides appropriate resources for the education of Alberta students and for the infrastructure that supports their learning. By targeting investment on the early years of schooling, on special education, and on English as a second language for Canadian-born students, the province is ensuring these students get the help they need without draining resources from the classroom. These initiatives will provide a solid foundation of basic skills that will contribute to the continued success of students throughout their school years.

Accountability is a key feature of provincial investment in education. The provincial government and school authorities report annually on the use of the funding and the results achieved.

Focus on the Early Years of Schooling

- **Literacy skills programs, ECS to Grade 2:** Starting in September 1998, funding of about $22 million will be provided each school year over the plan period for intensive literacy programs to develop reading skills of young students at risk of falling behind in school.
- **Teacher aides, Grades 1 to 6:** Starting September 1998, about $10 million will be provided each school year over three years for teacher aides to assist in elementary grades.
- **English as a Second Language for Canadian-born students:** Starting September 1998, funding for English as a second language programs will increase by about $5 million each school year to include Canadian-born students whose first language is other than English.

Total Education Spending, 1998/1999 to 2000/2001

(thousands of dollars)

	Comparable 1996/1997 Actual	Comparable 1997/1998 Budget	Comparable 1997/1998 Forecast	1998/1999 Estimates	1999/2000 Target	2000/2001 Target
Consolidated Ministry Expense	2,719,545	2,822,316	2,959,793	3,029,832	3,129,292	3,205,260
Property Tax Support to Opted Out Separate School Boards	161,934	167,646	155,046	158,614	161,444	163,376
Total Education Spending	**2,881,479**	**2,989,962**	**3,114,839**	**3,188,446**	**3,290,736**	**3,368,636**

Focus on Instruction

- **Basic instruction:** The basic instruction amount will increase by $30 per student in April 1998 followed by increases of 2 per cent in September 1998 and 1 per cent in September 1999 and September 2000. By 2000/2001, about $93 million will have been added to basic instruction funding since Budget '97 to address cost pressures in the classroom. In addition, starting in 1998/1999, $8 million in equity funding will be added to the Instruction Block each year to recognize differential costs related to sparsity and distance.
- **Enrolment growth:** Over the plan period, funding will be provided to recognize annual enrolment growth of 2 per cent. By 2000/2001, about $171 million will have been added to the base over Budget '97 to accommodate an increasing number of students as the Alberta Advantage continues to attract families to the province. As well, teacher pension costs related to hiring more teachers and contract settlements will increase by $12 million. About three out of every four dollars that supports school board spending continues to be directed to instruction.
- **Students with special needs:** Total special education funding will increase by about $86 million by 2000/2001 over Budget '97 to recognize both increased numbers of students with severe special needs and increased costs of providing programs for all students with special needs. This increased funding will enable children with special needs to get the help and support they need in school.

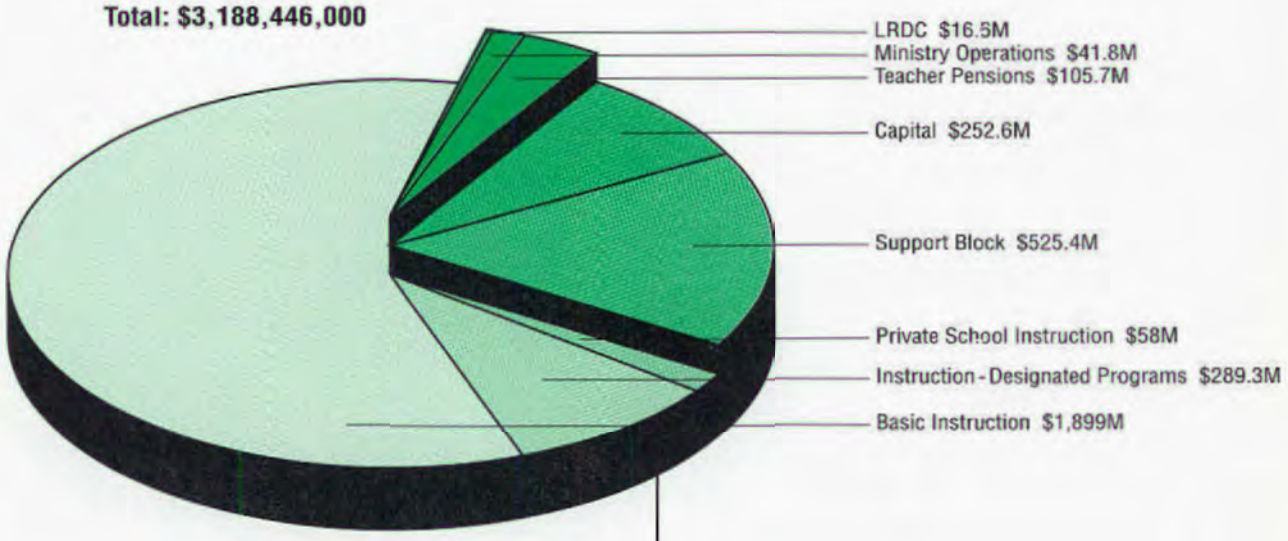
  Funding for students with severe disabilities will increase to $11,600 and students with severe emotional/behavioural disorders will continue to receive $8910. The per-student basic instruction amount for programs for students with mild or moderate special needs will rise to $325. This represents about $3250 per-student in the Instruction Block based on a 10 per cent incidence rate of mild and moderate special needs students. These increases will provide 30 per cent more funding for programs for students with other severe disabilities and for those with mild and moderate special needs starting in 1998/1999.
- **Instructional technology:** Annual provincial funding of $20 million per year for instructional technology will be extended to 2000/2001 to continue to provide up-to-date information technology for students in the classroom. The requirement that school boards must spend a matching amount to access provincial funding for instructional technology will be eliminated starting April 1, 1998. This will give school boards more flexibility in deciding how to allocate funds to meet local needs.

Support for Education Infrastructure

- **Student transportation:** Starting September 1998, about $13 million more will be provided each school year to implement the block funding of rural transportation and to address increased school bus maintenance and replacement costs.
- **School facilities:** This three-year plan includes $140 million annually for school maintenance, renovation and construction projects, an increase of $18 million starting in 1998/1999. In addition, $100 million was added in 1997/1998 as a one-time allocation to address critical infrastructure needs. This funding will ensure students continue to have a safe, positive learning environment in their school and classrooms that supports their learning.

Education Spending, 1998/1999

Total education spending in 1998/1999 will reach almost $3.2 billion, of which 96.4 per cent, or nearly $3.1 billion, will support education in public and separate schools. The balance will provide support for private school programs, including private kindergarten (ECS), Ministry operations and the Learning Resources Distributing Centre (LRDC).



- Capital funding includes allocations for school construction and renovation projects of $140 million and debenture interest of $112.6 million.
- The Support Block includes school board governance and administration, student transportation, and building operations and maintenance.
- Support for private schools includes $32.7 million for grades 1-12 and $25.3 million for private kindergarten (Early Childhood Services) programs provided by private schools ($8.1 million) and private ECS operators ($17.2 million).
- Examples of designated programs: funding for instructional technology, students with severe special needs, kindergarten (ECS), English as a second language, early literacy and teacher aide programs.

Education Goals, Results, Strategies & Measures

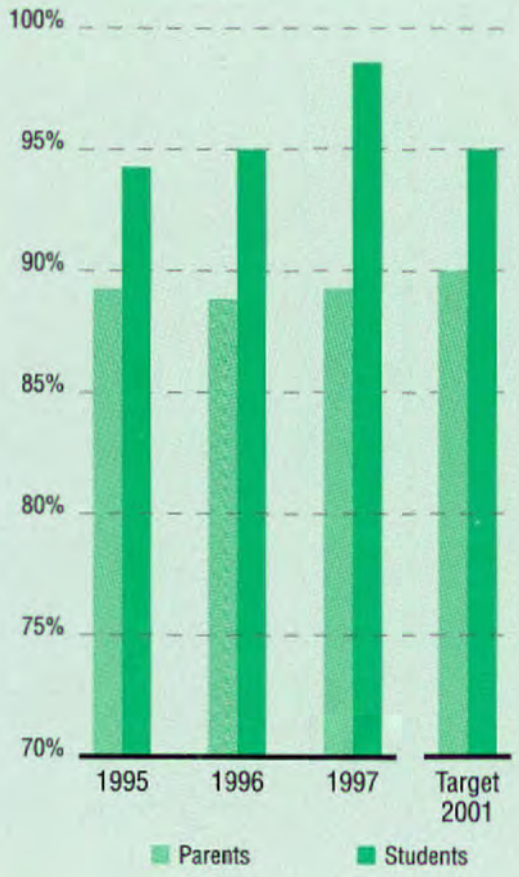
Goal 1: Education is focused on what students need to learn and students achieve high standards.

Results

- Alberta's education system has high learning standards.
- Students learn what they need to know.
- Students achieve provincial and national learning standards, and perform well in international comparisons.

Key Measures

- *Percentage of high school students and parents (of K-12 students) who are satisfied overall with the quality of education.**



* Public satisfaction with the quality of education to be collected and reported starting in 1998.

Department Strategies

1.1 Establish intensive early literacy skills programs for students needing extra help with reading in ECS to grade 2.

1.2 Establish a teacher aide program for grades 1 to 6 to increase classroom support and to enhance opportunities for students to achieve learning expectations.

1.3 Expand English as a second language programs to include Canadian-born students whose first language is other than English.

1.4 Work with other provinces and territories to develop common standards and resources for social studies and for distance learning exchanges.

1.5 Begin revising secondary science programs.

1.6 Revise curriculum to emphasize business awareness, employability skills and career education.

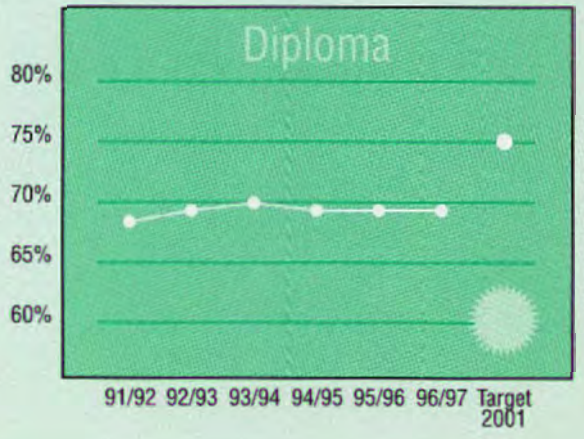
1.7 Update health and physical education programs to emphasize active and healthy life skills.

1.8 Work with partners to create more opportunities to communicate the accomplishments of students.

1.9 Provide classroom assessment materials to enhance teachers' understanding of provincial standards.

1.10 Provide information to parents on what students are expected to learn and to schools on what each student has achieved in relation to provincial standards.

- *Percentage of students who receive a high school diploma or certificate or enter post-secondary studies within six years of entering grade 9.*



- *Percentage of students in grades 3, 6 and 9 writing provincial achievement tests who achieved the acceptable standard.*

Subject	1995	1996	1997	Standard
Grade 3 Language Arts	83%	86%	87%	85%
Grade 3 Mathematics	91%	91%	93%	85%
Grade 6 Language Arts	81%	84%	84%	85%
Grade 6 Mathematics	82%	85%	88%	85%
Grade 6 Science*	N/A	80%	77%	85%
Grade 6 Social Studies	79%	78%	78%	85%
Grade 9 Language Arts (literacy)**	84%	88%	87%	85%
Grade 9 Mathematics (numeracy)**	66%	69%	66%***	85%
Grade 9 Science	78%	81%	78%	85%
Grade 9 Social Studies	77%	79%	81%	85%

Note: 85% of students are expected to achieve the standard. The percentage who met the acceptable standard includes the percentage who met the standard of excellence.

* The new grade 6 science curriculum was optional in 1995/1996 and fully implemented in 1996/1997.

** Student results on the grade 9 achievement tests in language arts and mathematics are reported annually by the provincial government as indicators of literacy and numeracy.

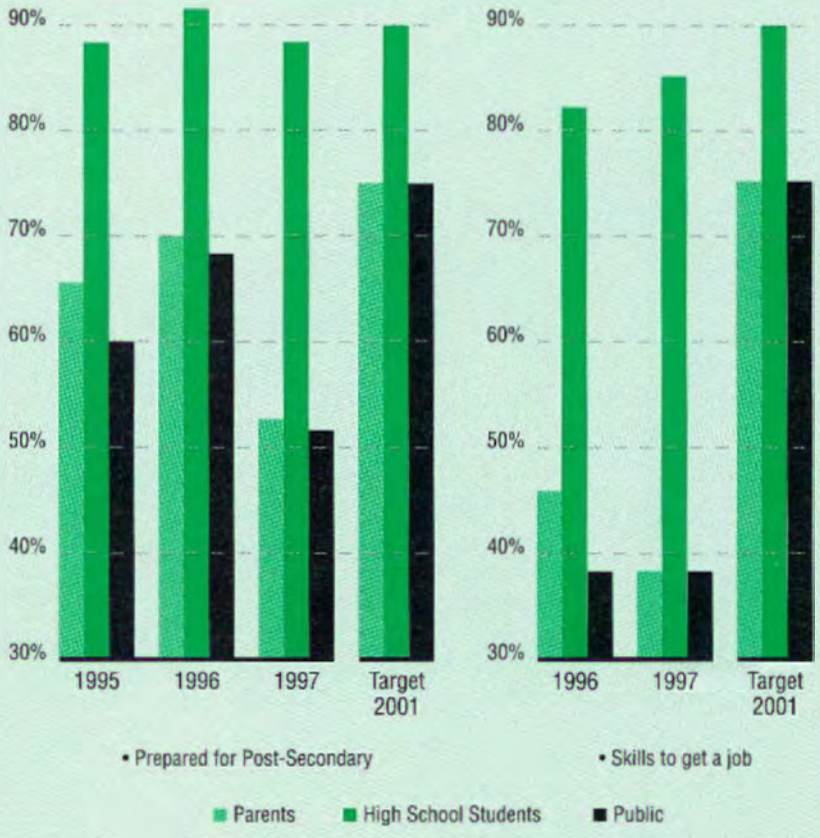
*** New curriculum was introduced in grade 9 mathematics in 1996/1997.

- *Percentage of students writing grade 12 diploma examinations who achieved the acceptable standard.*

Subject	1992 /1993	1993 /1994	1994 /1995	1995 /1996	1996 /1997	Standard
English 30	88%	87%	87%	91%	88%	85%
English 33	86%	85%	86%	86%	86%	85%
Social 30	80%	84%	84%	84%	84%	85%
Social 33	–	–	–	83%	81%	85%
Mathematics 30	75%	75%	74%	74%	75%	85%
Mathematics 33	–	–	–	79%	81%	85%
Biology 30	82%	81%	81%	77%	82%	85%
Chemistry 30	82%	80%	84%	82%	79%	85%
Physics 30	82%	85%	84%	80%	80%	85%
Science 30	–	–	–	79%	81%	85%

Note: 85% of students are expected to achieve the standard. The percentage who met the acceptable standard includes the percentage who met the standard of excellence.

- *Percentage of parents, high school students and the public satisfied that high school graduates have the knowledge and skills to get a job or are prepared for post-secondary studies.*



Supplementary Measures

- Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied the curriculum focuses on what students need to learn and learning standards are high enough.
- Performance of Alberta students in national and international assessments compared with students outside Alberta.

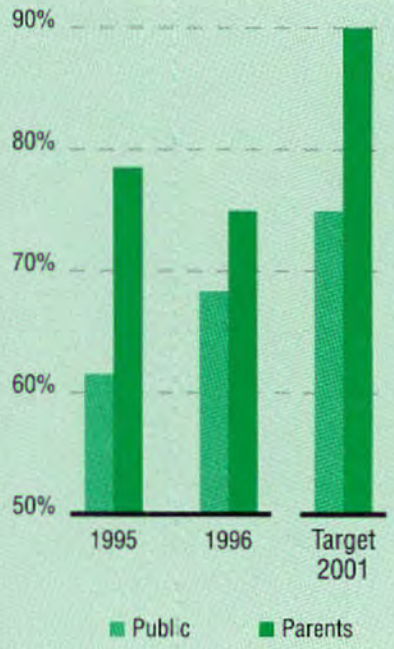
Goal 2: Education in Alberta is responsive to students, parents and communities.

Results

- Parents, business and the community have meaningful roles in education.
- Parents and students can choose schools and programs within the public education system.
- Schools provide a safe and caring environment for students.

Key Measure

- *Percentage of parents and the public satisfied with their opportunities for involvement in decisions affecting education in their local schools.*



Supplementary Measures

- Percentage of students who are enrolled in various delivery choices within the public education system.
- Percentage of students and parents who believe their school provides a safe and caring environment.

Department Strategies

2.11 Work with government departments, business and educators to:

- help youth explore a broad range of career options by providing up-to-date information on labour market needs, career preparation and opportunities for further learning;
- improve transitions for youth from school to work and further learning;
- strengthen connections between school and workplace learning; and
- expand opportunities for youth to develop career preparation and employability skills.

2.12 Support and monitor the effectiveness of school councils.

2.13 Monitor the implementation of school-based decision making.

2.14 Continue to implement and monitor the effectiveness of charter schools.

2.15 Communicate actions to promote safe and caring schools.

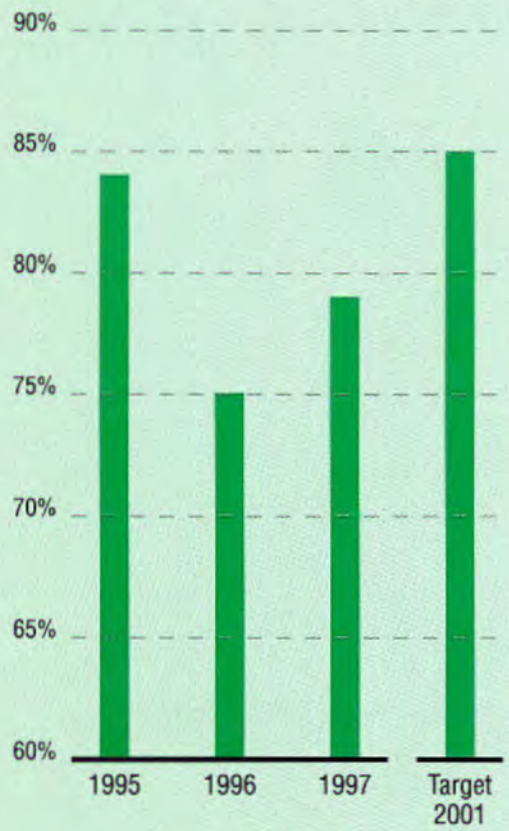
Goal 3: Students have access to the support services they require.

Results

- Services for children are co-ordinated at the provincial and local levels.

Key Measure

- *Percentage of parents of students with severe special needs who are satisfied with services for their child.*



Department Strategies

3.16 Work with Alberta Health, Family and Social Services, other government departments, regional and school authorities and community partners to better meet the health and related needs of children in school.

3.17 Work with other government departments and post-secondary institutions to develop service co-ordination skills of post-secondary students preparing for careers in education, health, justice and social services.

3.18 Work with school jurisdictions, Alberta Family and Social Services, Child and Family Services regional authorities and Aboriginal communities to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children in schools.

3.19 Provide guidelines to assist school authorities to work more collaboratively with local agencies to improve services for students with special needs.

3.20 Work with school authorities, Alberta Family and Social Services, other provincial, regional and community partners to implement the Redesign of Children's Services so that services are co-ordinated and accessible for children in school.

Goal 4: Teaching in Alberta consistently is of high quality.

Results

- Teacher preparation and professional growth focus on the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to help students learn.
- Teachers know the Alberta curriculum and have the skills and knowledge needed to provide students with the best possible opportunity to learn.
- Teachers evaluate student needs and progress, and use the results to improve student learning.
- Teachers help students achieve provincial learning expectations and high standards.

Department Strategies

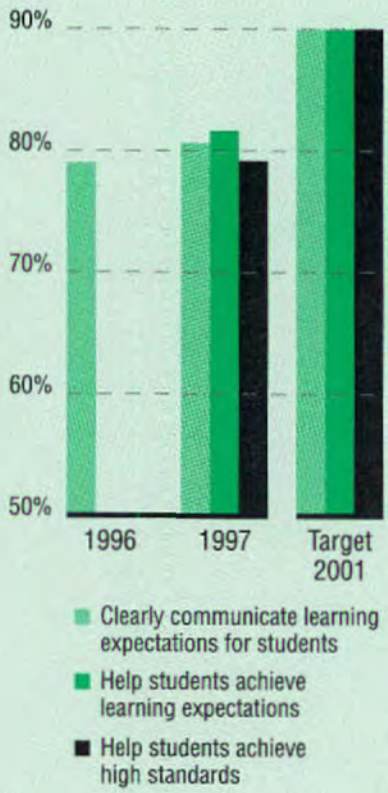
4.21 Implement the new Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy.

4.22 Work with education partners to develop materials that help principals and administrators enhance their leadership skills.

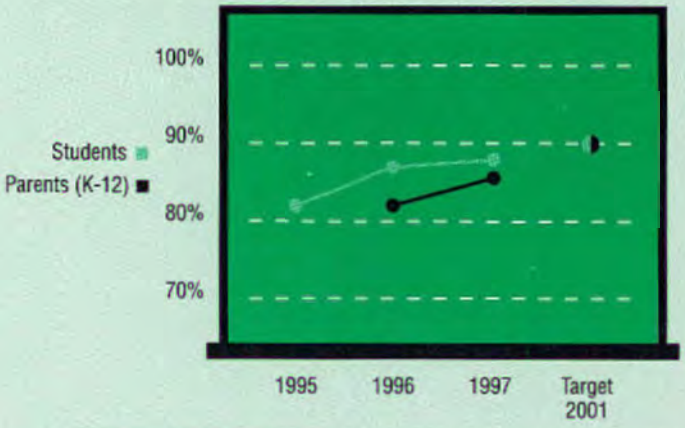
4.23 Establish internships for recent education graduates as part of implementing intensive early literacy programs.

Key Measures

- *Percentage of parents who agree their child's teacher communicates and helps students achieve learning expectations and high standards.*



- *Percentage of high school students who agree teachers use a variety of methods to meet their needs and percentage of parents who are satisfied teachers use methods that help students learn.*



Supplementary Measures

- Percentage of principals who agree that teachers holding an interim certificate:
  - know how to evaluate student needs and progress, and
  - use results of their evaluation to improve student learning.
- Percentage of teachers receiving permanent certification who report:
  - their teacher preparation program, and
  - professional development while holding an interim certificate provided them with the competencies needed to help students learn.

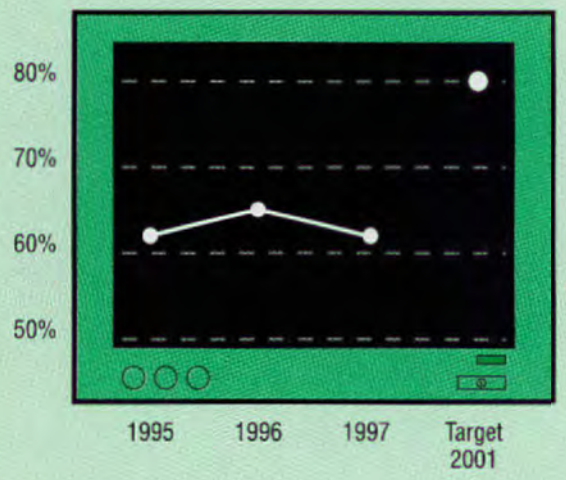
Goal 5: Information technology is integrated into education to enhance student learning, and increase efficiency and flexibility of delivery.

Results

- Students have information technology knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for K-12 learning, post-secondary studies and the workplace.
- Information technology expands choice and flexibility in what, when, where and how students learn.
- Teachers integrate information technology into instruction and management of student learning.

Key Measure

- *Percentage of high school students who report that school helps them improve their computer skills.**



* Views of parents to be collected and reported starting in 1998.

Supplementary Measures

- Ratio of students to modern(ized) classroom computers less than five years old.
- Variation in student/computer ratio among schools.

Department Strategies

5.24 Integrate technology outcomes throughout the curriculum.

5.25 Work with partners to develop courseware and delivery alternatives for Career and Technology Studies (CTS).

5.26 Expand teachers' ability to integrate technology into instruction by supporting professional development opportunities in concert with education, business and institutional partners.

5.27 Work with business and school jurisdictions to provide high school courses by satellite and other innovative technologies so that rural students have access to a greater range of courses.

Goal 6: The education funding system is fair, equitable and appropriate.

Results

- All school boards and schools are funded equitably and appropriately.
- Albertans pay comparable education taxes on properties of equal value.
- The province, school authorities and schools are efficient in their use of available resources.

Department Strategies

6.28 Implement a new capital plan to address school maintenance, renovation and construction needs.

6.29 Increase and restructure funding for students with special needs.

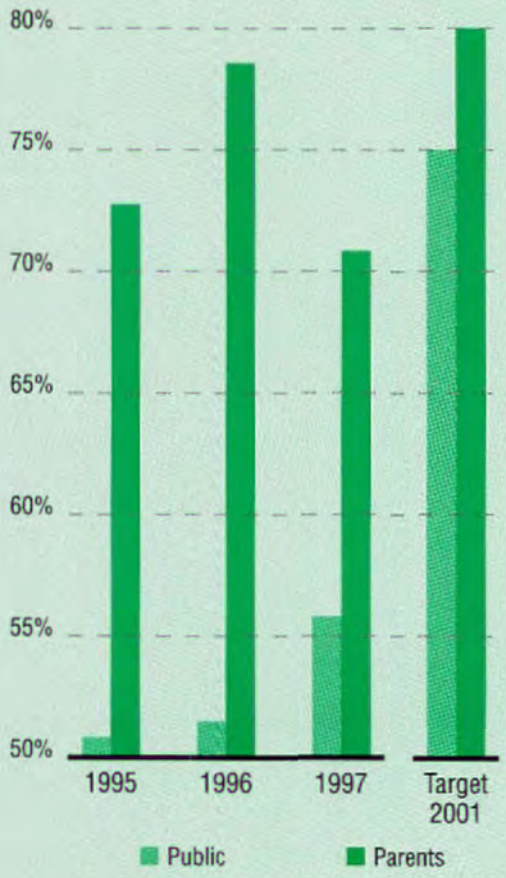
6.30 Eliminate the requirement for school boards to match provincial instructional technology funding.

6.31 Increase and restructure funding for student transportation.

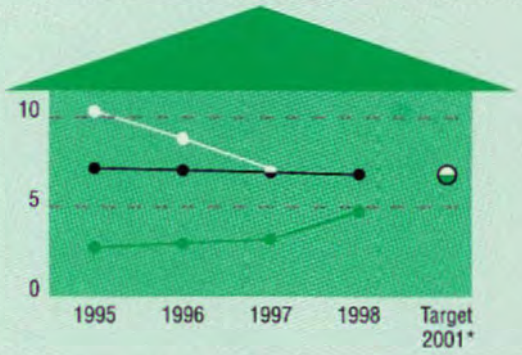
6.32 Complete the phase-in of uniform property tax rates for education.

Key Measures

- *Percentage of parents and the public who are satisfied with the value received from public funds spent in their local school.*



- *Difference in annual provincial equalized residential property tax rate for education (Alberta School Foundation Fund - Basic Levy).*



* *At or below*

	1995	1996	1997	1998	Target 2001
Highest mill rate	10.23	8.54	7.02	6.95	–
Lowest mill rate	2.80	3.07	3.85	4.81(E)	–
Provincial mill rate	7.29	7.12	7.02	6.95	at or below 6.95

Supplementary Measures

- Differences in school jurisdiction overall per student spending and per student instructional spending per school year.
- School jurisdiction spending on instruction and administration as a percentage of total school jurisdiction spending.

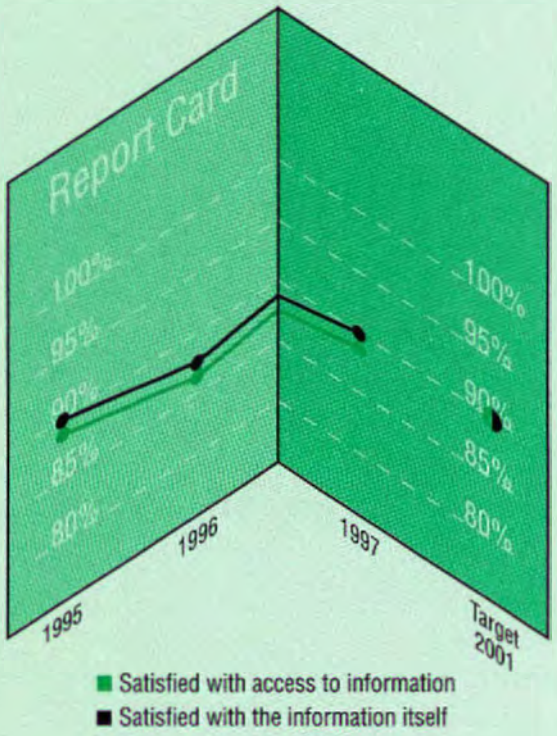
Goal 7: The education system is open and accountable for the achievement of results and use of resources.

Result

- Albertans have timely and meaningful information about education, including student achievement and cost, from the department, school authorities and schools.

Key Measure

- *Percentage of parents satisfied with the information from their school on their child's educational progress and achievement.*



Supplementary Measure

- Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied with information received about how money is allocated to and spent by schools, school jurisdictions and the province.

Department Strategies

7.33 Monitor school board implementation of school three-year education plans and results reports.

7.34 Assist school authorities in the September 1998 implementation of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation.

7.35 Report regularly to government and the public on improvement in results supported by the new investment in education.

7.36 Continue to assess school authority education plans and results reports, provide feedback and use results to improve education.

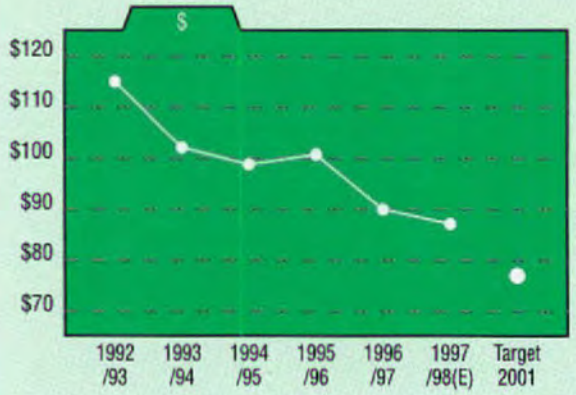
Goal 8: Alberta Education is managed effectively and efficiently to achieve government goals.

Result

- Department service is of high quality, affordable and focused on the needs of education partners.

Key Measure

- *Cost of department administrative services per public school student.*



Department Strategies

8.37 Privatize or eliminate department functions that are not suitable or essential for government.

8.38 Simplify and reduce regulatory requirements and provide this information to the public.

8.39 Enhance the ability of department staff to communicate directions and objectives for education and the accomplishments of students.

Ministry Consolidated Income Statement (thousands of dollars)

	Comparable 1996/1997 Actual	Comparable 1997/1998 Budget	Comparable 1997/1998 Forecast	1998/1999 Estimates	1999/2000 Target	2000/2001 Target
REVENUE						
Provincial Education Property Taxes	1,176,303	1,169,454	1,182,100	1,099,400	1,120,600	1,144,600
Sales of Learning Resources	23,888	22,157	22,754	22,620	–	–
Other Revenue	9,269	4,007	4,357	3,811	3,811	3,796
Consolidation Adjustments	(12,591)	(5,943)	(5,943)	(5,818)	–	–
Consolidation Revenue	**1,196,869**	**1,189,675**	**1,203,268**	**1,120,013**	**1,124,411**	**1,148,396**
EXPENSE						
Operating Support to Public & Separate Schools						
• Basic Instructional Grants	1,750,876	1,783,343	1,807,762	1,899,399	1,976,595	2,034,742
• Severe Special Needs	53,771	60,610	69,296	83,171	91,665	96,465
• Early Literacy	–	–	–	12,250	20,250	20,550
• Other Instructional Grants	84,728	90,731	85,693	96,592	103,523	105,326
Support Grants (Administration, Transportation and Operations & Maintenance)	489,504	492,876	495,331	525,368	543,400	554,450
Less:						
Property Tax Support to Opted Out Separate School Boards	(161,934)	(167,646)	(155,046)	(158,614)	(161,444)	(163,376)
Sub-Total	2,216,945	2,259,914	2,303,036	2,458,166	2,573,989	2,648,157
Early Childhood Services	77,846	93,940	93,940	96,640	99,690	107,690
Private School Support	29,091	30,980	31,280	32,710	33,200	33,700
School Construction and Renewal	110,030	122,030	222,030	140,030	140,030	140,030
Teachers' Pensions - Current Service Payments	98,146	98,890	100,732	105,700	112,100	114,000
Other Financial Assistance to Schools*	127,478	158,568	150,859	137,625	128,167	119,467
Learning Resources Distributing Centre	23,194	22,177	22,384	22,620	–	–
Ministry Operations	39,913	41,210	40,925	41,766	41,566	41,666
Interest on Advances from the General Revenue Fund	665	550	550	550	550	550
Consolidation Adjustments	(3,763)	(5,943)	(5,943)	(5,975)	–	–
Consolidated Ministry Expense	**2,719,545**	**2,822,316**	**2,959,793**	**3,029,832**	**3,129,292**	**3,205,260**
Gain (Loss) on Disposal of Capital Assets	–	–	–	(695)	–	–
NET OPERATING RESULT	**(1,522,676)**	**(1,632,641)**	**(1,756,525)**	**(1,910,514)**	**(2,004,881)**	**(2,056,864)**

*Includes Debenture Interest Payments, Technology Upgrading, Learning Resources Subsides

Alberta
EDUCATION

Agenda
for Opportunity

Introductory Comments

There is nothing more important for Albertans than to make sure our children get the best education and the best chance to succeed.

With the following plan, I am confident every student will see a real and positive benefit.

For young children, we are going to do more to ensure that they can read well by the time they begin grade three. With better support for teachers in the classroom, children in the early grades will get the time and attention they need to learn and succeed.

Children with special needs will get the special support they need. And by expanding funding for children with special needs, all children will benefit. Additional resources spent by schools on meeting special needs can now be used in every classroom to benefit every child.

For junior and senior high school students, we'll keep the focus on high standards, keeping students in school, and making sure they have the skills they need when they graduate.

Finally, additional funding for transportation, increased enrolments and costs, and for renovating and fixing schools, means all children will have better transportation, better schools, and a better chance of success.

Over the coming years, we will assess the impact of the following 12 initiatives, make sure they are achieving the results we expect, add new ideas and adjust the priorities to build in new approaches wherever it is necessary.

Education has always been about partnerships with many key players. I want to re-commit this government to work in partnership with **all** those working to ensure … **First things first … our children.**

Sincerely,

Gary G. Mar, Q.C.
Minister of Education

If we want to make a real difference in a child's life ... if we want to dramatically improve chances for success in education ... we need to start early.

Albertans understand the importance of education to the future of every child and to the future of our province. Education is the key that unlocks our children's potential, giving them the knowledge and skills they need, and inspiring them to keep learning throughout their lives.

Albertans want and expect their education system to give children and young people the opportunities they need to learn and to succeed. They want education to be a top priority for their government.

Alberta is fortunate to have an education system that is known as one of the best in Canada. Our students' achievements consistently exceed results in other provinces. We have a good foundation and a long tradition of commitment to excellence in education.

Over the past few years, we have made tremendous progress in restructuring and refocusing Alberta's education system. Throughout, the focus has been students and the classroom ... reducing administration, improving student achievement, providing choices for parents and students, expecting more decisions to be made at the school level, and expanding technology as a tool for students to learn and improve their knowledge. Now, we will build on these changes and move ahead. We will continue to improve Alberta's education system.

We know we can do better. We know there are strains beginning to show in our education system. We know that in a growing province like ours, with more children and new families moving into the province, the first place we see an impact is in our schools. We listened to issues raised by parents, students, teachers, trustees and administrators. And now we are taking action.

The focus of our plan is not on simply spending more money to do the same. Instead, we are putting first things first. Putting our children first. And especially putting young children first – giving them the good start they need to read, to learn, and to succeed.

The critical difference in this action plan is the focus on young children. If we want to make a real difference for children, we need to start when they are young. We will assess students' skills and identify any learning difficulties when they are still in early childhood programs. We will make certain children can read by the time they enter grade three. We will emphasize teaching them the skills and the confidence they need to keep learning. We will need to work more effectively with others in the community to address students' unique needs, because for many, their needs extend beyond the classroom.

For the next few years, action on education will follow through on the specific initiatives outlined in this package, then assess the impact, and determine where further changes are needed. Government's Three Year Plan for Education will reflect this package of initiatives. Specific strategies will be contained in the new plan. We will work closely with school boards, teachers, parents and administrators. And through these actions, we will keep the focus where it belongs …on our children.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

Albertans have a long history of supporting education, and they expect their education system to be one of the best in the world. People involved in Alberta's education system – teachers, parents, administrators, school trustees, community members and Alberta Education staff – have worked hard over the years to meet those expectations.

The result is a solid foundation for our education system.

Think about the changes that have taken place over the last few years.

- Annual achievement tests in grades three, six and nine have been expanded and diploma exams have been added for Science 30, Social Studies 33 and Math 33.
- Albertans now receive annual reports on the performance of the education system from the provincial government, their school board and their children's school.
- New science and math programs have been developed, and there's a new statement setting out expectations for kindergarten programs. Actions have been taken to improve the achievement of high school students in math.
- A strong emphasis has been placed on keeping kids in school and increasing the number of students who complete high school. As a result, almost 70 per cent of Alberta's students now complete high school.

70 per cent of Alberta's students complete high school

- School councils operate in every school in the province, giving parents the opportunity to get involved in their child's school.
- Charter schools have been introduced to give more choice to parents and students.
- Several schools in the province now operate "virtual programs" – programs where students are linked to school by computers and the Internet.
- The number of school boards has been reduced from 181 to 62, funding for administration has been capped, and more decisions now are made at the school level rather than in central offices.
- New funding for technology has allowed schools to purchase computers, equipment and software programs for their classrooms.
- We have moved to full provincial funding for education.
- Standards for quality teaching have been developed.

These are just highlights. Across the province, teachers, principals and school boards have responded to the challenges of restructuring education. They have reorganized and restructured how they deliver programs, made the best use of the resources they have, and directed their attention to the classroom. Schools have actively involved parents, the business community, and a broad range of community members in finding the best solutions for their students' unique needs.

All of this means that dramatic changes are not needed in Alberta's school system. We are starting from a strong position. What we need now is an added boost … a combination of additional funding to address pressure points in the system and a real, concerted effort to give young children the edge they need to succeed and keep on learning.

Listening to Albertans

In the past few months, we listened to the concerns of Albertans.

The most common themes are these:

- Do not abandon our efforts to keep older students in school, improve their achievement, and give them the skills they need to go on to post-secondary education or right into the workforce. But if we really want to make a difference, we need to do more when our children are very young, especially to make sure they can read well.
- Ensure that children with special needs receive the attention and the support in school they need. More children in school have special education needs, whether those needs stem from mild learning problems, very complex physical, mental, emotional and behavioural disabilities or being gifted students. Teachers and schools are having a difficult time coping with these children without additional support.

- A highly skilled workforce is critical to the future of our economy. Alberta's schools have a crucial role to play in ensuring that young people graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge they need. We must ensure students have the motivation and desire to keep learning. Young people need to know the importance of an education to open the doors to post-secondary education or that all-important first job.
- The Alberta Growth Summit said "people development" should be the first priority for the province. And that clearly translates into a strong emphasis on education.
- Many have said that our schools simply need more money to deliver the services our children need. Our province is growing, and more students mean added pressures on the limited resources available in schools. At the same time, people want the additional dollars targetted to areas where they can make a real difference for children.
- School boards have said that many of their schools are aging and need repairs and renovations. A growing population also means overcrowded classrooms and the need for new schools. It is important that we maintain our investment in the more than 1400 schools and make sure that classrooms provide the kind of environment students need to learn, achieve and succeed.
- Knowledge and education will be the key to every child's future success, and to the future prosperity of our province. In a province like Alberta, we will not settle for an education system that is anything less than the best.
- People want Alberta's young people to succeed in school. They want them to meet high – made in Alberta – standards and develop strong skills. They want our students to match up with the best in the world. And they want a school system where no one gets left behind.

We listened to these concerns. This action plan takes direct aim at solving problems we know are in our school system. But it also takes a longer term view, knowing that there are no quick fixes in education, and knowing that the best way to make a difference is to start at the beginning, with young children just entering school.

Most important, the focus of this action plan and all actions in education must be on the central theme – **First things first ... our children**.

Over the coming years, we will build on the foundation now in place and direct our energies and actions in 12 key areas.

1. Every child can read well.

Most young children come to school eager and ready to learn. This means they catch on quickly, learn to read, and steadily build their skills. These children become confident learners, ready to take on new challenges and learn new skills and ideas.

But for some children, learning to read does not come as easily. Some may not have early experiences with reading, listening to their parents read to them or exploring words and pictures in books. Others may have learning difficulties that make learning to read a challenge.

We know that learning to read is the first and most important building block to education success. Unless children can read and read well, they have difficulty learning other skills, learning to solve problems in math, understanding new concepts or expressing their ideas. Children who have reading problems quickly lose confidence in their ability to learn.

Actions to be taken

- Introduce an early reading initiative focused on children from kindergarten to grade two. The initiative will begin in May 1998 with full implementation planned for September 1998.
- Assess children's ability to recognize letters, know the sounds they make and begin to recognize some words and colours in kindergarten, then follow-up with special strategies for children who are having difficulty.
- Hire intern teachers to work with classroom teachers in kindergarten to grade two. With additional funding, roughly 540 intern teachers can be hired specifically to help young children learn to read. Intern teachers would help assess the reading abilities of children in kindergarten and start working with students that show early signs of falling behind.
- Work with teachers and school boards to develop the necessary support materials and demonstration models. Schools will have the flexibility they need to develop the best approaches for their children.

Results we expect

- By the time children enter grade three, they will be able to read well.
- Children at risk will get the special help and attention they need so they can learn to read and get a good start on future education success.
- More children will meet the acceptable standards set by language arts achievement tests at the grade three level.
- First time teachers will get direct experience in the classroom and a "foot in the door" for their future teaching careers.

2. Improved support in the classroom

For children to learn, they need time and attention. They need someone who sees when they are struggling, helps them with explanations, provides the inspiration and "push" to learn more, and celebrates their successes. This is especially important for young children in the early grades.

In some elementary classrooms, teachers are struggling to provide that special one-on-one attention children need. Whether it is because there are too many children in the class or because there are several children with special education needs in the same class, teachers need additional support so they can teach and children can learn. One of the ways to do this is to provide help in the classroom, so teachers can spend more time with individual students.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to hire teacher aides to work with classroom teachers in grades one to six.

Results we expect

- Combined with other initiatives and additional support provided in this package, teachers will have better support in the classroom and have more time to spend with individual children.
- Roughly 370 teacher aides will be hired for schools across the province. This is on top of the number of teacher aides already working in schools, and does not include additional support for children with special needs.

3. Special needs children are supported

The number of children with special education needs in Alberta's schools today is growing rapidly. Estimates are that the number of children with severe disabilities will increase from 6,500 in 1996/1997 to 8,000 in the 1997/1998 school year.

Schools also are seeing an increase in the number of children with mild and moderate learning disabilities.

The reasons why the numbers are increasing are complex. As enrolments increase, it is reasonable to expect a corresponding increase in the number of children with special education needs. In addition, improved medical care is helping more children with severe disabilities live longer and attend school. Improved assessment techniques help spot particular learning problems in children who may have fallen between the cracks in the past. And for some children, problems in their families can result in difficulties learning in school.

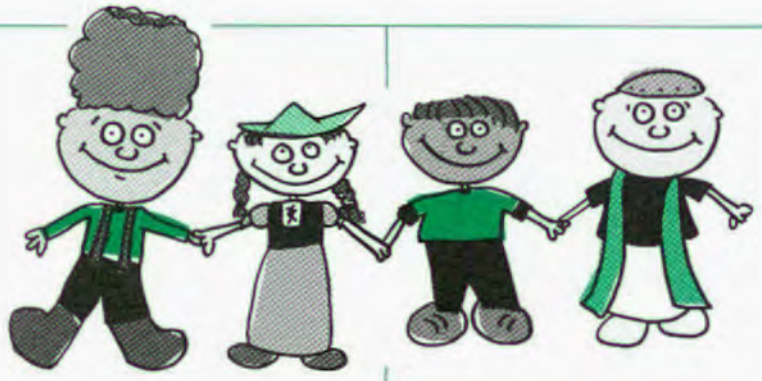
Schools have worked hard to provide programs for children with special needs. Funding that is intended to support all children is being used to meet special needs.

Actions to be taken

- Increase the current funding for children with mild and moderate special needs by 30 per cent. This funding will continue to be part of the basic per student allocation, but it will be targetted to children with mild and moderate disabilities and school boards will be expected to report on how the money was spent.
- Increase the current funding for children with severe special needs by 30 per cent as well. This will increase funding for each child with severe physical and mental disabilities from $8,910 to $11,600.
- Maintain funding for children with severe emotional/behavioural needs at the current levels – $8,910 for each child.

Results we expect

- Children with special needs will get the help and support they need.
- Teachers will have additional support for meeting the needs of these special children in their classrooms.



4. Learning our language

We understand that some children and families new to Alberta have an additional challenge of learning to speak English. And for many years, government and school boards have supported English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for children who come to Alberta from other countries and who don't speak English to ensure they are not left behind.

But there are many children born in Canada whose first language isn't English. They come to school with the same challenges as children new to Canada, but have not been eligible for the special support that an English as a Second Language program provides. These children may come from Native families where their first language is Cree or Blackfoot. They may come from particular communities where the language spoken at home is not English.

Actions to be taken

- Extend eligibility for English as a Second Language programs to all children whose first language is not English, including children who are born in Canada. (ESL programming is provided for a maximum of three years).
- Focus the programs from kindergarten to grade three so these children get the early help they need to learn English.

Results we expect

- Canadian-born children who don't speak English as their first language will quickly become proficient in English.
- The chances of long term success of these children in school will be improved dramatically.
- Improved results on grade three language arts achievement tests.

5. Setting the pace ... high standards and positive results

We already noted that Albertans want and expect students to meet high standards and to be able to compete with the best in the world. They want an education system with high expectations and a deliberate commitment to making sure those expectations are met.

Alberta is known as a leader in setting standards and testing students' achievements. In the past few years, we have expanded achievement testing programs so they now cover all core courses for children in grades three, six and nine. We added new courses to the list of diploma exams students are expected to write before they can graduate from high school.

Special emphasis has been placed on improving math skills of students at the high school level.

This important work must continue as part of this new action plan. By focusing on young children, and making sure they can read, we will give more children a chance to succeed and meet the high standards we set.

Actions to be taken

- Continue to provide information to parents about what children are expected to learn.
- Continue to work with other provinces and territories to develop common curriculum standards and learning materials.
- Set clear expectations for reading and writing in the early grades.
- Increase the emphasis on problem solving so children can apply their knowledge.
- Revise curriculum to emphasize business awareness, employability skills and career education.

Results we expect

- Students consistently achieve high standards.
- Young children get the special help and attention they need so they can succeed.
- Ongoing improvements are made in Alberta's curriculum.
- Parents and community members understand what's expected of children in school and are satisfied with the results they see.
- A five per cent increase in the number of students meeting the acceptable standard of achievement in grade three language arts over the next three years.

6. Putting programs together for children

Children come to school with a wide variety of needs. Some can be addressed by schools, but others go beyond the expertise or responsibilities of schools and teachers to address.

Today, there are a number of government departments and community organizations providing help and support for children. Too often, though, these programs are not well co-ordinated. Different groups may not be working together, combining their resources and expertise to get the best benefit for every child. People working with children may not always know what is available in their communities. Teachers and others working in schools want children to have better access to the services they need.

Work is underway in Alberta Family and Social Services to redesign children's services and improve co-ordination and access to services for children within communities across the province. As this work proceeds, schools and Alberta Education will play an active role, working with local agencies and organizations to focus resources on meeting children's needs.

Actions to be taken

- Play an active role in plans to redesign children's services.
- Provide guidelines to schools to help them work with local agencies to improve services for students with special needs.
- Work with other government departments, particularly Health and Family and Social Services, to ensure that the health and related needs of children are met.

- Targetted funding for Native education initiatives will be jointly planned with Family and Social Services.
- Work with Health to improve speech and language assistance to children in schools.

Results we expect

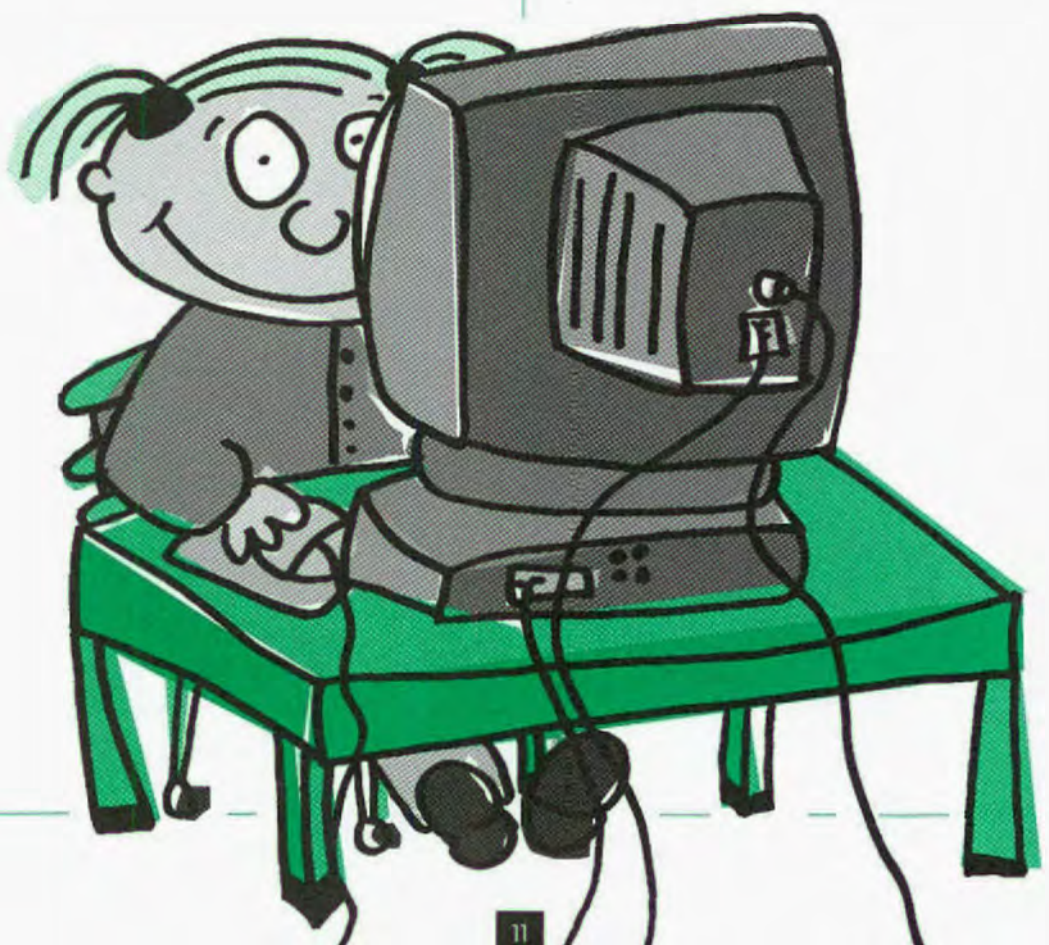
- For children at risk, there is a continuity from health programs for newborns and young children, to early intervention programs in the community, to early reading help once they begin kindergarten and the early years of school.
- Community agencies, government departments, health authorities, and schools work together to put children first and ensure their needs are met.

7. Technology provides tools for learning

Look around our homes or where we work. Think about how we do business today, how we keep in touch with friends and family, or how we search out new information. Chances are you'll find technology is front and centre.

The same is true for schools. Technology provides a tool for learning and a link to vast amounts of information through the Internet. Students leaving high school need technology skills to help them on the job, with further education, or with a lifetime of learning. And for young children, technology provides an important tool to expand their learning.

Since 1996, the provincial government has provided targetted funds to help school boards cover the costs of information technology, whether for computers, access to the Internet,



or for software. However, one of the current requirements is that school boards have to match provincial funds. This requirement for matching funds places a heavy burden on many schools, particularly in smaller communities.

Actions to be taken

- Remove the requirement for matching funds.
- Maintain targetted funding for technology integration in schools as a key part of education.
- Encourage new ways of integrating information technology in the classroom by working with teachers, businesses, post-secondary institutions and education faculties.

Results we expect

- Students leave school with a good working knowledge of information technology and the skills to use it in their future studies and work.
- Young children have access to information technology as a tool to expand their learning.
- Teachers are able to show students how to use technology as a learning tool.

8. We work together for success

This building block is not new. But it is more essential than ever for the success of children in school.

For the past few years, we have encouraged people to get more actively involved in the education system. Putting first things first applies not just to teachers and schools. It means people have to work together. And that includes parents, education professionals, people in the business community, in the arts and cultural organizations, seniors – all community members.

At the Alberta Growth Summit, people from all walks of life agreed on a single priority – people development. In education, that means developing capable and well educated children. It means preparing young people for the workforce of tomorrow, with the understanding that learning will be a constant part of their lives.

Schools need the participation and support of business people to give young people an understanding of the world of work and the skills they need to get a job, start a career, or launch their own business. Community members can teach children about community responsibility, good citizenship, and helping others in need. Artists, performers, athletes,

seniors, professionals … everyone has something to offer. We need their help.

Actions to be taken

- Improve the transition for young people from school to work and further learning.
- Work with business people, educators and other government departments to help young people explore career options and make sure they have up-to-date information about careers and job opportunities.
- Strengthen connections between schools and the workplace.

Results we expect

- Young people have the skills they need to go on to further education or enter the workforce and make a positive contribution.
- Children become good citizens and contributing members of their communities.

9. Getting our children to school

For many Alberta children, their school day starts when they get on the school bus first thing in the morning. Transportation of students is an important part of Alberta's education system.

Parents expect their children to get to school safely, on time, and by the most direct route possible. School boards understand that the costs of meeting those expectations are growing. In large urban areas, student transportation costs have increased 12 to 14 per cent. The last time school transportation funding was increased was in 1992/1993.

Combined with increasing costs, making sure school buses are well maintained is a primary concern.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional support to school boards to address the costs of new buses, insurance, maintenance, fuel, and drivers' wages.
- Implement a new rural transportation funding formula that encourages and rewards greater efficiency.

Results we expect

- More efficient transportation of students.
- Improved maintenance for school buses.

10. A growing Alberta means more children in school

All the signs for continuing growth and prosperity in Alberta are positive. We know that with growth comes added pressures. As the Alberta Advantage attracts more people to the province, schools are one of the first places to feel the impact of a growing population.

In Alberta, funding is guaranteed for every child in school. School boards receive funding based on the number of students they have. To not recognize growth in our schools would compromise the long-standing guarantee of funding every child and make it difficult for schools to provide children with the programs they need.

Actions to be taken

- Provide additional provincial funding to support an expected increase of two per cent in the number of children in school.

Results we expect

- Funding for schools will increase based on realistic expectations about growing numbers of children in the province.

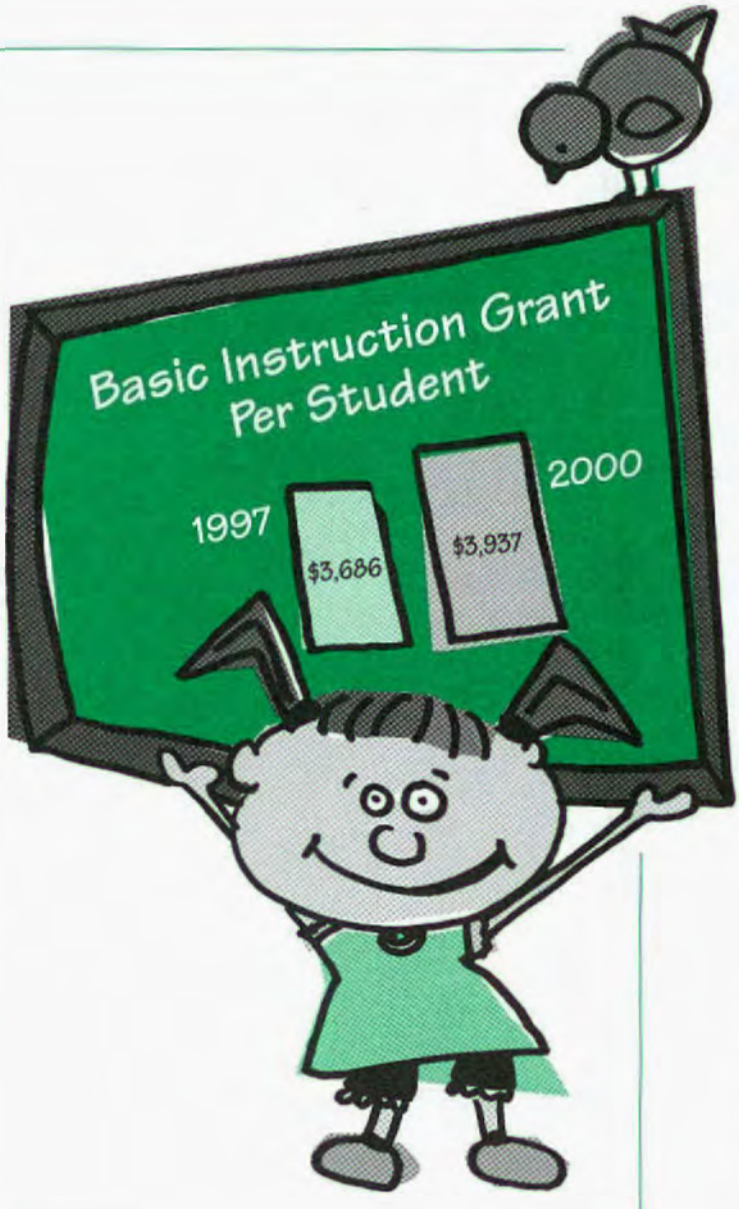
11. Provide solid financial support for the classroom

To meet the needs of all the children they serve, schools need a solid base of financial support. Over the past four years, funding for education was reduced as part of government's balanced budget plans. Now that the goal of a balanced budget has been achieved, and government is on track with debt reduction, money is available to re-invest where it is needed most. Education for Albertans is at the top of the list.

For the past four years, costs have been gradually increasing while resources remained limited. Schools need an appropriate base of funds and the flexibility to use those funds in the best ways possible to meet their students' needs. Increasing the basic funding for instruction in schools is the best way for the province to ensure that the needs of all children are being met. With a solid base of funding, schools can direct funds where they are needed most.

Actions to be taken

- In September 1998, increase the portion of the basic instruction grant for mild and moderate disabilities ($250) by thirty per cent ($325).
- Increase the balance of the basic instruction grant ($3,466) by two per cent in September 1998.
- In September 1999, increase the basic instruction grant by one per cent, and by an additional one per cent in September 2000.
- With these increases, the basic instruction grant for every student in the public education system will increase from $3,686 in 1997/1998 to $3,937 by September 2000.



Results we expect

- Schools have a solid base of funding, the flexibility to use those resources wisely, and to make sure the needs of children come first.

12. Improve schools and classrooms

Today, two-thirds of Alberta schools are more than 25 years old. For anyone who owns a 25 year old house, even with regular maintenance you know that renovations and repairs are needed.

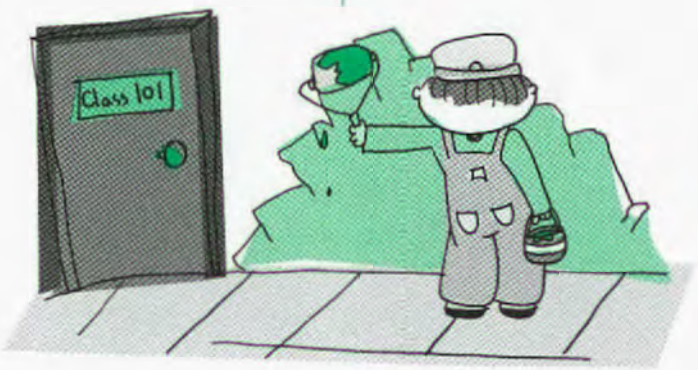
Over the past few years, many school capital projects were put on hold. The result is a substantial backlog of school maintenance and renovation projects.

Actions to be taken

- Increase total spending on school capital projects by special infusion of an additional $100 million in 1997/1998.
- Introduce new approaches to capital funding so that a block amount of funds is available to schools to cover regular and ongoing maintenance of schools.
- Increase funding of equipment needed for Career and Technology Studies programs in the capital funding available to schools.

Results we expect

- Students will continue to have safe, healthy, and positive learning environments in their schools and classrooms.



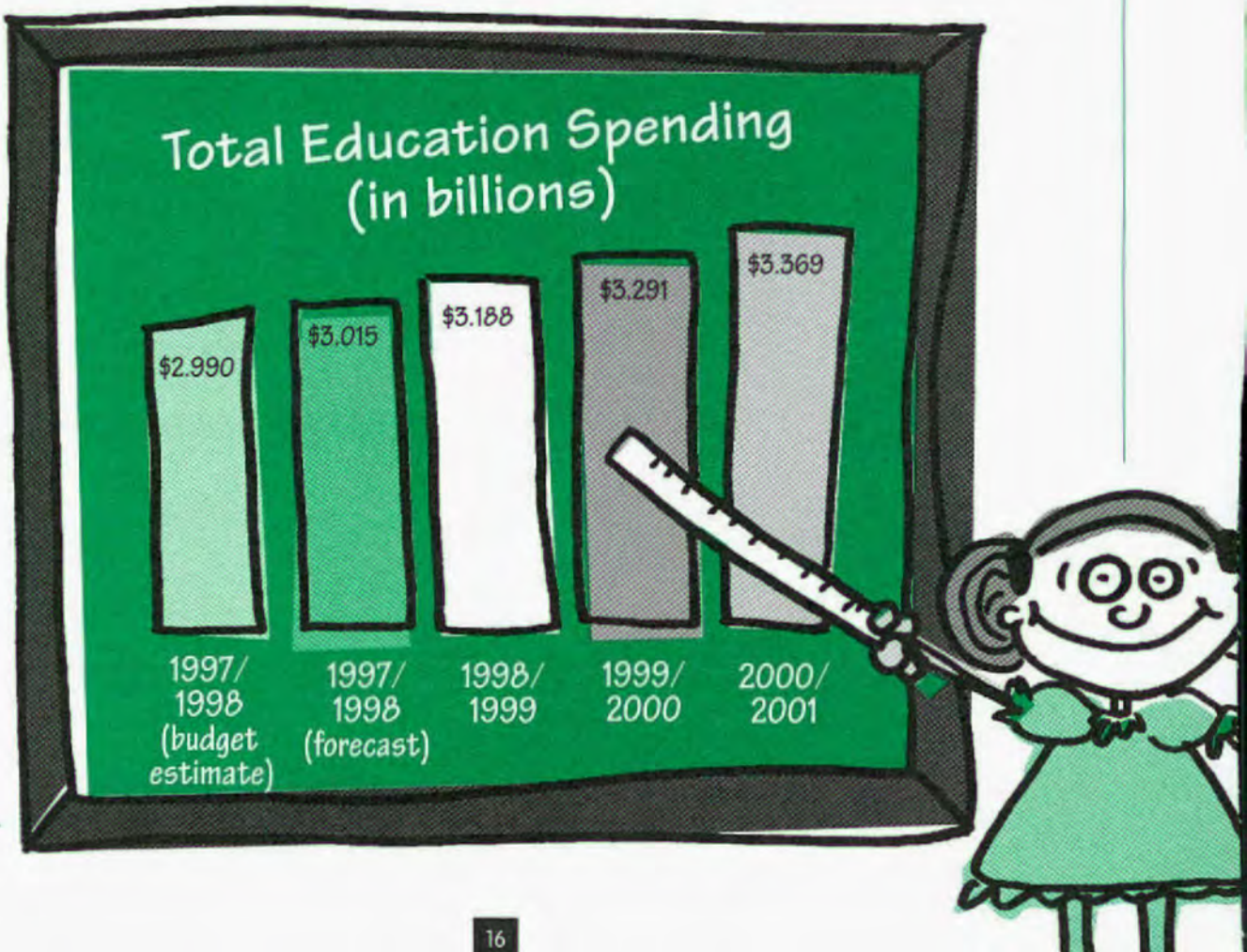
Next steps to implementation

With this action plan in place, steps will be taken immediately on each of the 12 points. For programs like the early reading initiative, children in kindergarten in the spring of 1998 will be the first ones to see the direct impact. For most of the other components, implementation and adjustments to funding will begin with the next school year, starting in September 1998.

Work will begin immediately to fine tune this action plan with school boards, principals and teachers, and to ensure they are involved directly in the next steps. The special focus on young children means that elementary schools and primary teachers will have a vital role to play in the coming months.

While the focus is on children and what these initiatives will do to improve their education, we know that funding is important. Each of the initiatives outlined in this package comes with a price tag. The costs are substantial. This package of initiatives will result in total education spending of $3.188 billion in 1998/1999. Total education spending will increase to $3.369 billion by 2000/2001.

This additional spending is possible today because of the actions we took four years ago to balance the budget and begin to pay down Alberta's debt. The benefits of the tough course we had to take now will go directly to children.



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